



Memorandum

TO: PLANNING COMMISSION

FROM: Joseph Horwedel
Albert Balagso

**SUBJECT: GREATER GARDNER
NEIGHBORHOODS
STRONG NEIGHBORHOODS
IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

DATE: January 3, 2002

COUNCIL DISTRICT: 3 & 6

RECOMMENDATION

Planning staff advises the Planning Commission to recommend that the City Council: (1) approve the *Greater Gardner Neighborhoods Strong Neighborhoods Improvement Plan* as the City/community vision for the future of the Greater Gardner area, (2) authorize the Administration to direct the City Departments and Agencies with implementation responsibilities to begin their respective activities, including the general oversight of the implementation of the *Plan* by the Department of Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services, and (3) encourage the Greater Gardner property owners, residents and community members to dedicate their time, energy and resources to implement the recommendations of the *Plan* and continue their community building activities.

BACKGROUND

Greater Gardner Neighborhoods Planning Area. The Greater Gardner SNI area is located about two miles southwest of downtown San Jose, bordered by Interstate 280 to the north, Willow Street to the south, Guadalupe Expressway/SR 87 to the east, and Los Gatos Creek to the west. The area is comprised primarily of single-family residences with several scattered “mom and pop” retail stores and a small number of multi-family residences. In addition, the area contains several community facilities including Gardner Academy, the Gardner Community Center, and Biebrach Park.

The Greater Gardner Neighborhoods are represented by three neighborhood associations: Gardner Advisory Council, Gregory Plaza Neighborhood Association, and North Willow Glen Neighborhood Association. There was active participation from all three associations during the

planning process and on the Neighborhood Advisory Committee. The North Willow Glen Neighborhood Association was established during the SNI planning process with assistance from Parks, Recreation, and Neighborhood Services staff. During the SNI process, the three associations began working together on neighborhood improvement projects that will benefit the entire area known as the “Greater Gardner Neighborhoods.”

Greater Gardner Neighborhoods Planning Process and Participation. During the preparation of the *Plan*, City staff and the planning consultants worked with community members and a 13-member Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC). The group met 12 times from October 2000 through November 2001, and a total of 200 individual people from the area attended at least one of the meetings. Four community workshops, to gather input from the larger community, were held between November 2000 and November 2001.

In Fall of 1999, students from SJSU’s Urban and Regional Planning Department commenced a year-long study of the Greater Gardner area. The study included two public workshops, and extensive outreach to and participation by community members from the entire Greater Gardner area. The students generated a plan and their work served as the basis for the SNI planning effort, which commenced in Fall of 2000 once the SJSU process concluded.

Over 150 people attended one or more of the community workshops hosted by SJSU or by the City as part of SNI. In addition to the NAC, who were instrumental in driving the planning process, there was a core of dedicated community members who attended most NAC meetings and who contributed significantly to the planning process.

The consultants, Terry Bottomley and Julie Conrad of Bottomley Design and Planning, facilitated all meetings and workshops. They worked with SJSU’s team, led by professor Dayana Salazar, to ensure a smooth transition from the SJSU to the SNI planning process. SJSU contributed substantially to the content of the *Plan*.

ANALYSIS

Purposes of the Plan. The purpose of the *Greater Gardner Neighborhoods Improvement Plan* is to capture the concerns, vision, and ideas of members of the Greater Gardner area and bring them together into a working document that helps to guide future actions in the community.

Vision. Stakeholders in the Greater Gardner area crafted a vision for the future of their neighborhood where:

- The existing neighborhood character is highlighted while increasing the overall attractiveness and livability.
- The neighborhood is pedestrian and bicycle friendly.
- Children have safe routes to school and recreation facilities.
- Tree-lined, well-lit streets connect several “pocket parks” with existing community facilities.

- Open spaces integrated with pedestrian networks create a strong neighborhood identity, reflect its unique character, and integrate it with the surrounding community.
- Gateways at key neighborhood entrances distinguish the area.
- Local businesses blend in with the surrounding buildings and provide a merchandise selection that suits the needs of the community.
- The neighborhood is safer, more accessible, and supports the daily needs of its residents.

Draft Plan. Over the course of the planning process, community members discussed many actions and policies that could bring positive changes to the area. The Action Plan is comprised of those Action Items selected by community members as the best means for achieving the community's shared vision for the future.

A. The "Top Ten" Priority Actions. The "Top Ten" Priority Actions represent the short list of priority actions that the community selected as having the greatest potential for positive impact. Priority actions were chosen by community members at a workshop in May 2001 and are ranked in order of importance:

1. Repair/reconstruct deteriorated streets, sidewalks, and related systems.
2. Improve parking and circulation at Gardner Academy.
3. Improve and maintain open space along Fuller Avenue.
4. Improve neighborhood code enforcement.
5. Improve retail properties and merchandise selection.
6. Improve W. Virginia Street streetscape and crossings.
7. Improve Delmas Avenue streetscape and crossings.
8. Calm traffic and increase pedestrian safety overall.
9. Calm traffic and improve streetscape and crossings on Bird Avenue.
10. Establish a neighborhood open space program.

B. Other Improvement Actions. The Action Plan is presented as a matrix, which includes the above "Top Ten" Priority Actions plus many additional items totaling 28 Action Items organized around its general headings. Following are some highlights from the scope of the full Action Plan:

1. Neighborhood Condition and Maintenance. Community members seek to improve the overall appearance and condition of the neighborhood by cleaning up and beautifying areas of the neighborhood. Examples include creating neighborhood gateways, improving the visual and functional qualities of streetscapes throughout the neighborhood, and mitigating neighborhood noise levels caused by proximity to freeways, active railroad lines, and the airport.
2. Neighborhood Services. Community members seek to improve the effectiveness of City services to better suit the needs of the community. Examples include improving street sweeping and strengthening neighborhood organizations.

3. Neighborhood Security. Community members seek to improve traffic, pedestrian, bicycle, and railroad-related safety throughout the neighborhood. Examples include traffic calming measures, improvements to existing railroad crossings, and reducing the amount of homeless encampments in open spaces along freeways and railroad tracks.
4. Neighborhood Parks and Open Space. Community members seek to improve and maintain current open spaces, and to establish key streets as pedestrian and bicycle corridors to link major destinations and facilities. Examples include improved pedestrian, bicycle, and vehicular access to the LRT station located near the Virginia Street/SR87 Bridge.

Issues of particular note.

Gardner Community Center Master Plan process. During the 13 month SNI planning process, a separate Parks master planning process was underway to design the new Gardner Community Center, which will replace the existing center at its current location. Construction of the new center is expected to commence in Spring of 2002. In addition to the community center, the Master Plan identifies a location for a future gymnasium, which is not funded at present. The Neighborhood Advisory Committee included the gymnasium as an Action Item to indicate their support of the gymnasium as a desired future amenity.

Soils conditions. The community has identified the need to repair and/or reconstruct deteriorated streets, sidewalks, and related systems as their #1 Top Ten priority. Expansive soils underlie large areas of the neighborhood, causing numerous negative effects to the neighborhood including buckled streets and sidewalks, cracked home foundations, and damaged sewers. The first step to address this issue involves preparing a soils/geotechnical study of problem areas. A consultant is prepared to begin the study as soon as a funding source is secured. Residents strongly support the study as a means to determine whether different engineering standards are necessary so that repaired and reconstructed streets in areas with chronic roadway and sidewalks buckling problems will perform better over time. It is likely that the repair and/or reconstruction will be extremely expensive, but it is difficult to estimate the costs until the soil/geotechnical study is completed.

Remnant open spaces. Remnant open spaces are scattered throughout the neighborhood. Most are publicly-owned, the result of highway and railroad-related development. These spaces are utilized for everything from informal recreation areas to illegal dumping. Neighborhood residents have informally maintained one such space, known as Fuller Plaza. It is recognized in the *Plan* that the remnant open spaces are the only open spaces where new pocket parks and other improvements are possible because the neighborhood is mostly fully developed. The *Plan* recommends that the City create a new program for the improvement and maintenance of these open spaces and similar open spaces in other SNI areas. Neighborhood associations should be encouraged to provide additional levels of improvement and maintenance. At this time, there is still some question about which Departments would be responsible for improving and maintaining these open spaces in collaboration with community members.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

The *Plan* was developed in close coordination with members of the Greater Gardner Neighborhoods through more than one year of monthly Neighborhood Advisory Committee meetings and periodic community workshops. All property owners and residents within the Greater Gardner area were invited to all community workshops through postcard mailers, flyers, and PRNS and PBCE contacts. Community members actively participated in each phase of the planning process.

COORDINATION

The preparation of the *Plan* was coordinated with the Council Offices, the City Manager's Office, and various Departments and Agencies, including the Departments of Planning Building and Code Enforcement; Parks, Recreation and Neighborhood Services; Transportation; Public Works; and Police as well as the Redevelopment Agency, the Valley Transportation Authority, the Santa Clara Valley Water District, and the San Jose Unified School District.

CEQA

An addendum was prepared to the San Jose 2020 General Plan Environmental Impact Report which was previously certified on August 16, 1994 by the City Council (Resolution Number 65459).

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